Summary of “Sculpting Body Ideals: Alison Lapper Pregnant and the Public Display of Disability” by Ann Millett-Gallant

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In Ann Millett-Gallant’s essay “Sculpting Body Ideals: Alison Lapper Pregnant and the Public Display of Disability,” she discusses the Alison Lapper Pregnant statue in Trafalgar Square and the effects on society’s views of the disabled. Artist Alison Lapper agreed to be Marc Quinn’s subject for his statue when she realized that he was one of the few that did not want to exploit disability or pitied it (478). Gallant explained how Lapper was “born without arms and with shortened legs” and was an artist who “made work about her embodied experiences as a disabled woman” (473). Marc Quinn wanted to create a statue of her while she was seven months pregnant. While some people thought of Alison Lapper as a heroine and a proud advocate of disabled arts, not everyone had felt that way. Other people thought the statue was out of place in the Trafalgar Square because she was different. But that was what Quinn and Lapper wanted to represent: the mixing of the “normal” and the “non-normal.” Some people believed she “would seem out of place in such a paternalistic environment—the freakish anti-hero” but another important statue of the square resembled Alison Lapper pregnant in many ways (478). Admiral Horatio Nelson has a statue on a 185-foot tall column and it watches over the people in the square. That statue is very important to the park, but many people may not realize that Nelson was disabled. Gallant explains in the text, “Nelson only had one arm, and was blind in one eye, and he was just known as a great man; no one labeled him” (479). He was disabled just as Alison was but yet people had problems with her being in the park. Another argument of the public was the fact that she was pregnant, which can often be seen as a disability in itself. People have trouble with change, even when it is for the better. Gallant notes that Lapper is trying to show society that people should be more understanding of the disabled. Lapper was a talented artist but had “to prove herself to non-disabled people, intellectually, artistically, and sexually, due to assumptions about her so-called ‘lacking’ anatomy” (480). She began taking pictures of herself in the nude while in Venus-like poses like the Greek statue, Venus de Milo (480). Lapper and Quinn are both artists with goals of showing non-disabled people the beauty of art in any shape or form. Gallant used a quote from Lapper, “It is so rare to see disability in everyday life—let alone naked, pregnant and proud. The sculpture makes the ultimate statement about disability—that it can be beautiful and valid a form of being as any other” (474). They want to show the world something different and show them inner beauty and thought. Alison Lapper Pregnant is showing the beauty of pregnancy as well as someone disabled.

Millett-Gallant, Ann. "Sculpting Body Ideals: Alison Lapper Pregnant and the Public Display of Disability." *The Disability Studies Reader*. Ed. Lennard J. Davis. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.